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## FRENCH HOUSE FURNISHING.

By THEODORE CHILD.

THE ENTRANCE HALL, SMOKING ROOM, BILLIARD ROOM, AND PICTURE GALLERY.

IN the ordinary French apartment or flat, what we call the entrance hall takes the name of *antichambre*, and the form of a room of small or large dimensions, according to the scale of the dwelling into which the various rooms open and where the ways of communication of the apartment are concentrated. It is the room that you enter directly from the landing, and its conventional furniture consists of simply sitting accommodation, a table, a hat and umbrella stand, and lighting apparatus. The very name of *antichambre* has something disagreeable in its associations; formerly it was reserved for the valets and servants, and created the phrase *propos d'antichambre*, or, as we should say, "back stairs gossip."

The *antichambre* ought to be only a place of passage; the narrowness of modern French dwellings and the absolute necessity of economizing space have changed its destination, and the *antichambre* is the place where creditors, solicitors and visitors even are kept waiting. Nay more, unless the unknown visitor is introduced into the salon, and therefore at once into the intimacy of the interior, he must be received in the *antichambre*. In his work, *L'art dans la maison*, M. Henry Havard remarks this defect in French homes, and recommends the institution of the waiting-room, parlor, or *spreck kammer* as they exist in English and Dutch houses; a small room modestly furnished into which visitors are at once introduced, and where the master of the house can see and talk with them and introduce them or not, as he thinks proper, into the privacy of his interior. But as it is, the parlor does not exist in French houses.

If the *antichambre* in ordinary French dwellings is simply decorated, in rich apartments and private villas and mansions it often becomes remarkable for its elegance and splendor. In this splendor there is a measure to be observed; it must be proportioned to the richness of the rest of the house; it must, in short, be the preface at the head of the book that warns the reader of the surprises that are kept in store for him. The *antichambre*, properly conceived, will inform the visitor at once of the social position, fortune, and tastes of the person in whose house he finds himself.

In many Parisian houses I have seen the entrance hall converted into a regular museum, a receptacle for heterogeneous curiosities arranged in artistic disorder. This is, I think, an example not to be imitated, for above all in those rooms where strangers are received, a sensible order and symmetry is absolutely indispensable in the arrangement of the furniture and decoration. For, as M. Charles Blanc has excellently observed, the absence of all symmetry would be a mark of impoliteness towards the visitor, because it would cause him to feel embarrassed in the midst of the disorder produced by broken lines, colors badly assorted in their fortuitous collection, and displaced pieces of furniture. A person who has just passed through the noises and cries of the street expects to find calmness in the interior of the house that he enters, and this impression of calmness depends first of all upon the tranquillity that results from furniture arranged in goodly order according to the divisions and spaces assigned by the wall spaces and doors; and secondly, upon the softer interior light. For this reason we must prefer the *antichambres* arranged in the styles of the Renaissance, of Louis XIII., XIV., XV., or XVI., with their discreet or sumptuous elegance, with their fanciful grace or austere method.

For the decoration of the walls I have seen tapestries employed with fine effect above a wainscotted basement. In all the modern Parisian houses, where the style of the staircase allows, if staircase there be, a wainscotted basement will be found, and above this, if tapestry or perse or andrinople or some other hanging is not used, repoussé leather with rich gaufred and gilded pattern, or leather paper, or some of the forms of solid relief or lincrusta Walton will be found. On this decorative basis the furniture and objects of art are distributed according to the owner's taste; a solid Renaissance bench with cushions, two or three comfortable arm-chairs, in which a weary footman may repose at his ease; a big sofa that will receive new charm from the furs and plush of the mantles that the lady visitors will let fall upon it; a table placed so as not to interfere with the passage; a lantern of wrought iron or brass descending from the middle of the ceiling;

an umbrella stand which need not be ugly; a mirror; some faience or old arms or bibelots, and a few pictures; a thick carpet on the floor; some palms and flowers in the corners; a card tray on the table, and you will have the arrangement of a thoroughly Parisian *antichambre*, luxurious without ostentation, and rich without being pretentious. The arms, bibelots, and objects of art may be suppressed without impairing the general effect, but since we are living in an age of bibelotomania I am bound to mention their presence in the decoration of the day. Portières and drapery is used around the doors unless the doors and their frames be fine specimens of woodwork. The heating of *antichambre*, such as I have indicated, would be obtained by means of a calorifère.

Eccentricities and exotic arrangements of *antichambres* need not be specially noticed. I may mention one small *antichambre* in the house of a French artist composed entirely of Japanese elements. The ceiling is covered by a Japanese screen with its decoration of flowers and figures, and the walls are covered with matting of different shades panelled with bamboo, and on this matting are hung embroidered fukousas and Japanese paintings on silk. The woodwork is painted in two shades of blue, a *bleu mourant*, whose tones harmonize with the colors of a few bowls and polishes that are placed here and there.

It is not in every house, particularly in Paris, that a smoking-room is to be found. Still in our model French house provision must be made for this infirmity of the stronger sex. An excellent idea is to place the smoking-room next to the conservatory, as is the case in the house of M. Menier, in the Parc Monceau. The room, arranged in the Moorish style, is separated from the conservatory by portières and windows through which you see the plants. This arrangement at once provides the decoration of one side of the room and a supply of air cool enough to refresh and not cold enough to give a chill. Furthermore, to ensure tolerably clear air, the room is ventilated at the top. As regards the decoration of the smoking-room, there is obviously very little choice; it is a room that has no history and that has been invented in the present century. Evidently it would be absurd to decorate the smoking-room in the style of an epoch when people did not smoke. We must seek inspiration in a country of smokers, in the East, the country of nargilehs and bayadères, and we shall construct our walls of painted tiles or stucco or painted wood, gay with vermilion and gilding and blue and bright yellow. In the windows we shall place colored glass, and around the walls divans and low seats and little stools with curiously chiseled Indian and Persian brass bowls for ash pans; in short we shall endeavor to make our smoking-room look like the *antichambre* of Mahomet's paradise, such as we may happen to conceive it.

A billiard-room, like a smoking-room, is a luxury that few dwellings possess, nor does it lend itself readily to any specially artistic decoration. The size and shape of the room are fixed by the size and shape of the billiard table, which is naturally the principal object in the room. The tone of the furniture and wall coverings is limited in variety by the color of the cloth of the table, which is always green. In seeking our harmony, we shall be obliged to choose between garnet red and neutral grays or water green. Generally, billiard rooms look rather cold and vulgar. The billiard table itself is a heavy construction without beauty of line and without charm of detail; the postures of the players are ungraceful when they are not ridiculous, and the whole game is so impregnated with science that it seems difficult to surround it with artistic material. The French billiard table manufacturers, the furniture makers, the brass founders, and the decorators have certainly not devoted much attention to giving an artistic character to their products or to inventing objects and "fixings" specially adapted to the billiard room. At the Amsterdam Exhibition last year I noticed a set of furniture for a billiard room which was, at least, novel, if not very stylish. A table, the sofas, the cue rack, and marking board were of brown oak carved with garlands of oak leaves and acorns. The Dutch, too, often make the beds of their billiard tables of wood mosaic or parquet in colored woods. The effect is amusing, but I am afraid scientific players would sneer at such a substitute for the classic green cloth.

Another accessory room, even more of a luxury than the billiard and smoking rooms, is the picture gallery and the cabinet of curiosities. The latter, with its glass-covered show cases and its multiplicity of heterogeneous objects, must necessarily resemble, more or less, a museum; the

interest here is not in the *ensemble*, but in the details, not in the general composition of the room, but in the individual objects it contains. In the picture gallery the case is different; here it is possible and necessary to aim at some general decorative effect unless you are content to have your private gallery resemble a parcel of some public picture museum.

The suitable arrangement of pictures, statuary and other objects of art, exclusive of *bibelots* and curiosities, has been indicated to us by the Romans. We have only to follow the general lines laid down by the practice of the Romans and adapt them to the exigencies of our climate and our habits. Let us try to figure to ourselves the aspect of a collection in a house in ancient Rome. In the Roman house the *atrium*—the first room you reach on entering—is at once the sanctuary and the grand salon open to friends, dependants, and the public; the second part, the peristyle, is reserved for the family. In the *atrium* are the domestic gods and the family portraits with their genealogical scrolls or *stemmata*. The *atrium* was, evidently, the place for the display of objects of art, and the plan of the *atria* receiving light from the top in the centre and generally surrounded by a colonnade lent itself admirably to the placing of statues and larger decorative pieces. The *atrium* was, in reality, simply a courtyard, the sides of which were roofed in, while the centre or *compluvium* was in the open air. Imagine, then, an *atrium* in the Corinthian style, surrounded, as it was in the house of Scæurus (Pliny XXXVI. 2), by a portico composed of 38 columns 36 feet high, supporting a ceiling composed of gold and ivory panels.

Now, from the above brief indication, it will be seen that the Romans lived amongst their objects of art; their galleries were rooms in which they lived, and not mere miniature museums as too many modern private galleries are. The Duc d'Aumale's collection at Chantilly, for instance, is a museum, and as comfortable as a museum. The collection of the Princess M., at Paris, forms a part of the elegant surroundings in which that lady passes her life. The Princess M. lives in a two-story mansion in front of which is a courtyard surrounded by a colonnade, and in the centre a fountain. The colonnade is decorated with a few pieces of statuary and a profusion of plants and flowers. You enter the house, deposit your hat and coat in the antechamber, and enter on the right a long salon divided two-thirds of the way up by immense portières looped up on each side. In this salon are family portraits and busts; in the little salon at the end, where the princess receives her guests, are a few masterpieces of Porbus and other Dutch masters; in the salon at the side are more old masters, and, then opening out of these two rooms and separated only by a glass partition and drapery, is the conservatory gallery, an immense and lofty room with a glass roof covered by a velum.

The walls of this room are hung over with modern pictures; here and there a rare marble slab or pillar supports a bust; two or three small pieces of sculpture are to be seen on a console table on this side, and that together with some vases and bibelots. Near one end is a table with a rich and rare marble top, and on it an easel supporting two little masterpieces framed, back to back, and greeting the eye Janus-wise. In one corner is a piano, and all over the room sofas and ottomans and chairs and little retreats, overshadowed by palm trees and azaleas or camelias in immense jardinières of faience or cloisonné enamel, for the whole of the centre of the room is occupied by a forest of palms and other plants amidst which are interspersed comfortable seats. The arrangement of this room with its plants, its flowers, its floods of rich stuffs streaming down here from around some picture placed on an easel, its vases, its gold ornaments, its wonderful and graceful wealth of lounging accommodation, and its background of beautiful pictures, is one of the most perfect specimens of studied and *savant* disorder that I have ever seen. It defies analysis or imitation; it is a result that no one but a woman of exquisite taste and decorative genius could arrive at. This is not a picture gallery, if you like, and yet it contains a most choice collection of pictures. But, after all, why have a picture gallery? Why banish the pictures one loves, to a room where one cannot live with them habitually? Why go from our living rooms when we seek their enjoyment?

In my next article I propose to study the arrangement and decoration of the library, which will bring us to the end of our general considerations on French house furniture, and leave us free to return to a more complete and analytic study of certain details of French furniture and decoration.